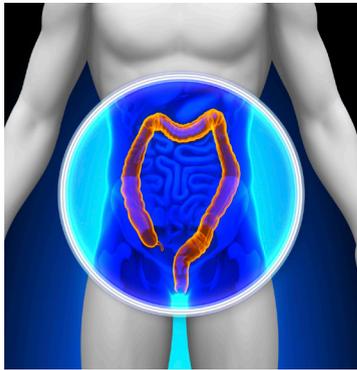


Peter Zajac, DO, FACOFP, *Author* • Merideth C. Norris, DO, FACOFP, *Editor* • Amy J. Keenum, DO, PharmD, *Health Literacy Editor*

## Clostridium Difficile



Clostridium difficile (C. diff) is a bacterium that affects the colon by releasing poisonous substances known as toxins. Most cases of C. diff occur in patients who have taken antibiotics. Older people and folks who are weak due to illness may need longer use of antibiotics and are at greater risk of getting this condition. Chances increase if they were in the hospital. The bacteria form spores that are found in the stool and can be passed on to others if they touch items or surfaces with feces (e.g. toilets, bathtubs) and then touch their mouth. The most common signs and symptoms of C. diff infection include: fever, loss of appetite, belly pain, nausea, weight loss, watery diarrhea (at least 3 times per day), and blood or pus in the stool.

---

## PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

- In the hospital, it is important that all doctors, nurses, and other workers wash their hands with soap and water before and after caring for you.
- Those caring for you also should wear gloves and aprons.
- Toilets, surfaces, floors, bedpans, bedding etc. should be washed often.
- At home, wear gloves and clean surfaces, especially in the bathroom, with a bleach solution (1 part chlorine bleach and 9 parts of tap water) made fresh daily. Scrub surfaces when cleaning and allow to air dry.
- Only take antibiotics when needed, as prescribed by your doctor.
- Wash your own hands often and carefully, every time after using the restroom and before eating.
- Try to use a your own restroom if you have diarrhea or make sure the bathroom is cleaned well if someone with diarrhea has used the commode.

## MEDICAL CARE AND TREATMENT OPTIONS INCLUDE:

If you should have any signs or symptoms of C. diff infection please contact your osteopathic family physician (DO) as soon as possible. C. diff infection detected and diagnosed early by a good history, physical exam, and labs & studies can be treated. The treatment is an antibiotic that helps the balance between the good and bad bacteria in the colon. Sometimes intravenous fluid is required. Your family doctor may talk with other doctors if needed to decide on the treatment that will work best for you. In case of any emergency, you should call your physician or 911 right away.

---

**Source(s):** CDC, Department of Health and Human Services, [Clostridium difficile.gov](http://Clostridiumdifficile.gov), and [UpToDate](http://UpToDate).

The Osteopathic Family Physician Patient Education Handout is a public service of the ACOFP. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in many instances; however, they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis by a physician. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, ACOFP suggests that you consult your family physician. This page may be photocopied noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with their patients. **For additional patient related educational material please visit [www.acofp.org](http://www.acofp.org).**